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JUN 20 1939

DRAMA

A MONTHLY RECORD OF THE THEATRE
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY
AT HOME & ABROAD



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THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE
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DRAMA

VOL 17

JUNE, MCMXXXIX

NUMBER 9

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

By A. E. Wilson

WE must in these days be grateful I suppose if a month of production in the theatre reveals as many as two plays of worth and intelligence directed to the adult mind. That two such plays should appear in any one month indeed constitutes a rather high percentage and for that reason the period which I review has more than usual interest in spite of the unexciting nature of the rest of what was presented.

The two plays were "The Intruder" at Wyndham's Theatre and "Bridge Head" at the Westminster. It is hardly necessary for me to deal with the former at much length, for François Mauriac's piece, under the original title of "Asmodée" and in the excellent version of Basil Bartlett, was only recently produced at the Gate Theatre.

It might be enough perhaps to applaud the courage of those who have seen fit to transfer a piece of such delicacy and distinction to a theatre which invites the general public.

But I am compelled to insist that the play is beautifully acted and I am glad to see it has provided a notable opportunity to that fine young actor Eric Portman who, as Blaise Lebel, the sinister tutor, dominates the play with the force of his uncanny presence. This is a conception of character remarkable in its fusion of so many elements of acting. It is not a part that could be "walked through" but one demanding many subtle touches.

It is true that this character, set among the real personages of the French provincial domestic interior, has a suggestion of purely theatrical invention, which no amount of good acting can overcome. Yet the play moves and lives by the presence of this dark, warped, enigmatic figure who exercises so powerful

an influence on the sentimental character of the mother—a woman vainly seeking to recapture something of the romance of youth when a young Englishman visits her home.

In its conflict of passions, in all its delicate perceptions of moods and emotions and in its revelations of the underlying forces and impulses governing character, the play is arresting and indeed very moving. As the mother who represses her own autumnal passion for the sake of her child's happiness Mary Hinton acts with great restraint but with emotional strength. Peter Coke's Englishman, Marian Spencer's repressed and depressed governess, are admirably done and Jill Furse's picture of love awakened in tender young womanhood enraptures with its delicate and sensitive beauty.

In point of intelligence and in the expertness with which the play is wrought "Bridge Head" is the equal of "The Intruder." In point of purpose it is superior. The author is Rutherford Mayne who, by this one piece alone may be deemed to be a dramatist of considerable account.

I should think few playwrights have worked upon such unpromising material with such surprisingly fine results. Who would have thought that any audience could be induced to find interest—and even to be enthralled—by such forbidding matters as congested districts, the working of the Irish Land Commission, the dividing up of dreary bog-lands, the squabbles of grasping and dissatisfied tenantry and the grievances of despoiled landlords? It is as though one should attempt to dramatise a Blue Book.

Yet Mr. Mayne has welded these unlikely things into a play which, once it has overcome

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

a slow start, excites for nearly every moment of its duration. And not only excites with the variety of incident but diverts intensely with its rich display of comedy.

The main purpose of the piece is to exhibit the heroic quality of an officer of the Irish Land Commission. There are few spectacles more compelling sympathy and admiration than a man, armed with ideals and with vision, struggling against the fates, sacrificing all personal interests and getting more kicks than ha'pence in his devotion to duty.

Such a man is Stephen Moore who dedicates his life to this arduous job and in this part Wilfrid Lawson conveys the sense of burden upon one who sacrifices so much for so little. There is great pathos in the spectacle of this man quietly and sadly retiring when his task is done. But the whole part is brilliantly played. Among the other good things may be reckoned the vivid performance of Stephen Murray, the great gusto with which Charles Victor represents an obstreperous farmer and J. Hwfa Pryse's delightful picture of a Japanese student engaged in the complexities of the Irish land question.

It is somewhat of a descent to touch upon other plays of the month. "Inquest" by Michael Barringer, revived at the Duke of York's after eight years, is worth attention if only because of Herbert Lomas's grand piece of character acting as the fussy coroner, a study which comes straight from life.

"Third Party Risk" by Gilbert Lennox and Gisela Ashley at the St. Martin's is a complex and very unlikely affair about a doctor who finds arson is the only way of avoiding exposure in his intrigue with a woman patient. John Wyse, Nora Swinburne and Ivy des Voeux did what they could in a tortuous maze.

"Grouse in June" by N. C. Hunter (Criterion) and "Uneasy Living" by Florence Kilpatrick (Kingsway) were two other trifles, the one about Americans in search of mythical Spanish gold in the Highland wilds; the other about the efforts to dislodge an agreeable limpet from his comfortable domestic rock. Both were light and amusing enough, diverting for the moment but leaving one nothing in the memory but the impression of having been pleasantly and innocuously entertained.

There was a great deal of activity in the Suburban theatres, and Peggy Barwell's adaptation of "Prison without Bars" seen at Kew deserves a chance of West End production.

THE FESTIVAL

THE fourteenth British Drama League Community Theatre Festival culminated successfully at the Scala Theatre, London, on Monday, May 22nd, when a full house assembled for the selection of the winning team out of a total entry of 386.

The judges, Mr. Tyrone Guthrie, Miss Louise Hampton and Mr. Stephen Williams awarded the Howard de Walden Trophy to Unity Theatre Club's performance of "Plant in the Sun" by Ben Bengal, and the Trophy was presented to the play's producer, Mr. Herbert Marshall, by Earl De La Warr, President of the Board of Education.

In introducing Earl De La Warr, the Chairman, Viscount Esher, commented on the fact that all his predecessors at the Board of Education since the inauguration of the Festival had attended the Final, thus emphasising the interest in the movement which was taken by the Board. This he felt was also a striking tribute to the work of the League.

There could be no doubt that the audience heartily concurred with the result of the adjudication. "Plant in the Sun" which is the simple narrative of the beginning of a sit-down strike in an American factory, might have been treated as a piece of broad melodrama. But the Unity Theatre Club players brought out every nuance of feeling in the play, while their grouping and timing reached what can only be called a professional standard. This can be said without any detraction from the excellent work shown by the other teams who were placed in the following order:

Stirling Amateur Dramatic Club in "Shells" by L. du Garde Peach.

Tonyfelin Dramatic Society in "Prize Onions" by E. Eynon Evans.

Sunderland Drama Club in "While of Unsound Mind" by Nan Richenberg, and

Hereford Y.M.C.A. Players in "This Earth is Ours" by William Kozlenko.

In "Shells," the scene of which is a dug-out in France, the bomb explosion at the end of the play proved unfortunately realistic, and our regretful sympathy is extended to one of the players, Mr. C. Baxter, who sustained a fracture of the right leg that entailed his instant removal to hospital. The accident passed unnoticed by the audience, who were only conscious of a very forceful performance of this both humorous and tragic little play.

THE LAST GREAT ACTOR-MANAGER

By E. Rhodes

SIR JOHN MARTIN-HARVEY'S farewell tour of the provinces has now taken place. It was inevitable—but somehow the news came, to repeat the well-worn phrase—"as something of a shock." We had all come to regard Sir John as a permanent figure in the theatre.

Without doubt, his name will be linked indissolubly with what has been termed, the "Golden Age" of English acting; with the cycle which stretched from Garrick and Macready to Kean and Irving; Martin-Harvey was the last of that great line of actor-managers.

Shaw and Ibsen came, saw and conquered—and in their wake followed innumerable lesser lights. We had the War, and the "cocktail-drinking" drama, the hurricane twenties of Noel Coward—laughter and plenty of it—followed by the simplified problem play plus entertainment. But in such an age of rebellious spirits and theatrical experimentalists and revolutionaries, the name of Martin-Harvey on the bills always assured a packed house. And the farewell tour saw not only the older playgoers availing themselves of a final opportunity of seeing a well-trying favourite, for a good fifty per cent of the audiences were composed of young people between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five. What has been the secret of Sir John's continued appeal throughout the post-war years? To what can we attribute his remarkable hold over a new generation of playgoers? There is something more than mere sentimental regard.

I think we may find the secret by remembering that no matter how styles of acting may change, there is always good and bad acting. Unlike many of our contemporaries, Sir John has no mannerisms. You cannot say it is Martin-Harvey because he does so and so. You only know that it *is* Martin-Harvey because of his magnificent voice—yes, still magnificent, even in his 76th year—and his genius for characterisation.

He is a master of gesture. See him point a reproving finger—or maybe a warning one—perhaps declamatory—or is it mischievous, with his eyes twinkling the while for all the world like a child bent on some new and entertaining prank?

I cannot recall any actor possessing such

eloquent fingers as Martin-Harvey. Watch him press them to his forehead in "A Cigarette Maker's Romance." Is Count Skariatine really mad, we ask ourselves. Notice the elegant way in which he rests them on a nearby couch. Remember their imperious gesture in "Œdipus."

Sir John has never been a "lazy" actor. Count Skariatine jumps about the stage as happy as a sandboy because his friends are coming. And then at the end of Act II we share with him the agony of his twisted, memory-lapsed brain, when he cries on the stroke of twelve, "Let them come! A few seconds more! Oh, God, let them come!"

Improbable melodrama though the piece is, acting such as this can transform it into something at once vital and alive; and is the story, fundamentally, not a true one? How many are there among us who have not been disappointed by the non-arrival of a long awaited friend?

The name of Martin-Harvey will always recall "The Only Way." Forbes-Robertson toured this, although the version was a different one. Wills's and Langbridge's adaptation is altogether more satisfying from the dramatic point of view, and to be preferred. There is, of course, no need for me to reiterate the story. Long before I knew anything about the stage, I remember seeing a cigarette card, showing Martin-Harvey as Sidney Carton.

An actor once told me that Sir John must know everything there is to know about Sidney Carton. True—and yet although I have watched Martin-Harvey on many occasions, I do not think I have seen him play the part the same way twice. It may only have been a slight variation of tempo—a slightly different gesture—but it has always been a *new* performance.

It is remembered of Edmund Kean that he could be a character one minute, and Kean the next, and the story goes that after bringing the audience to its feet by a particularly fine bit of acting, he turned to his son Charles who was standing nearby, and murmured, "We've done it again, Charles my boy! We've done it again!"

Similarly I remember Sir John (following

THE LAST GREAT ACTOR-MANAGER

the tribunal scene in "The Only Way") turning to one of the supers who had been playing the part of a judge, and saying, "You had a pen in your hand, but I never saw you write!" The quick eye of the experienced artist is apparent in this example.

Although he has produced plays by the moderns, the classical and romantic roles made Martin-Harvey a household name. But he has not been afraid to experiment. His "Hamlet" was in the school of Gordon Craig, and made theatrical history by the use of white panorama cloth and variegated curtains, with colour schemes emanating from the lighting.

"The Taming of the Shrew" proved his true worth as a producer of originality. All intervals were eliminated, and Christopher Sly slipped through the play as a member of the audience.

Maurice Maeterlinck, however, is Sir John's strongest card. It is interesting to note that he appeared in "The Burgomaster of Stilemonde" at Manchester when the crisis of September last was at its height. In spite of the precarious international situation, however, the theatre-going public crowded to see him—a further tribute, if indeed one were needed, to his wonderful ability and technique.

Perhaps his "Pelleas and Melisande" and "The Death of Tintagiles" offer his most striking contributions to the theatre. There are many who will vote for "Œdipus" and others who will remember "The Only Way," but it was Maeterlinck who revealed Sir John as an actor of the very highest order.

Sir Henry Irving, following the production of the Tennysonian drama, "The Cup" said to the well-known Victorian painter, Sir Alma Tadema, "Ah Tadema. When I am dead and gone, my art is gone, while your's lives for ever."

In reply, we can but quote from Maeterlinck*, "There is not a gesture, a thought, a sin, a tear, or an atom of acquired conscience that is ever lost in the bowels of the earth; at the most insignificant of our acts, our ancestors revive, not in their graves, where they never stir more, but deep in themselves, where they are still and always alive."

And for those who have had the pleasure and privilege of seeing him on the stage, the name of Sir John Martin-Harvey will be "still and always alive," too.

* Preface to the "Theatre."

A SURVIVAL OF THE SPANISH MIRACLE PLAY IN MEXICO

By Marie Seton

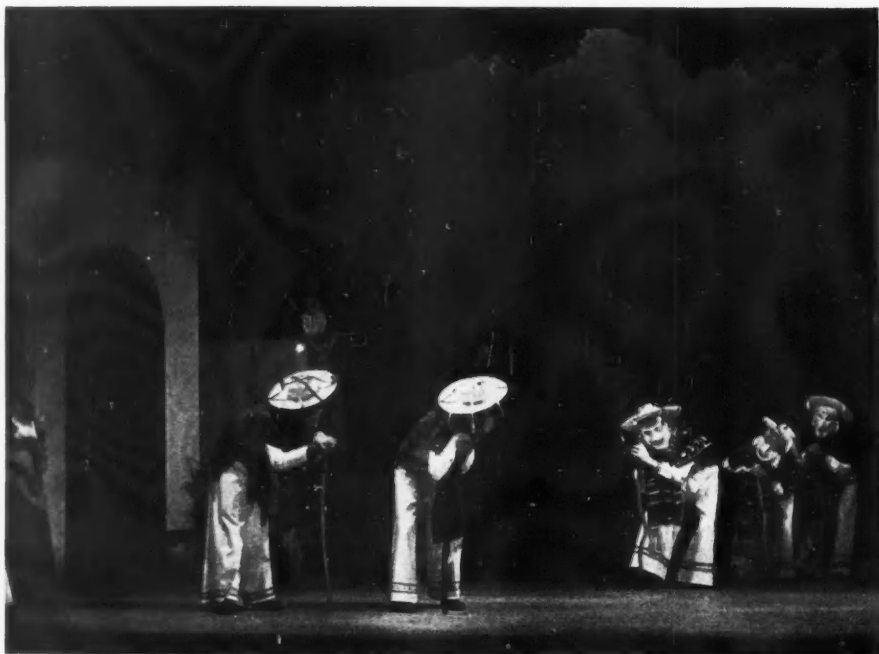
I ARRIVED in Santa Fé, the oldest town in America a week before Christmas. Still the capital of the State of New Mexico as it was in the days of the Spanish Conquest, even now Santa Fé can only be reached by road. To this day the chief language is Spanish, and there are many Spanish-Mexicans and thousands of Pueblo Indians in the nearby villages who cannot speak a word of English. Here in the south-west of the United States the American is still a coloniser, and in this great state where the Rockies end and the endless deserts of Mexico begin, old Spanish-Mexican customs and Indian village life continue at the same leisurely tempo as they did in the 16th century. In this little known part of America one is transported back to the Middle Ages at Christmas time, for customs and miracle plays that have long disappeared in Europe have never ceased to be part of the life of the simple people. The course of time turns backwards as the ceremonies which have been handed down for nearly four hundred years are heralded by the lighting of the luminario. All the roofs of the pinkish-brown boxlike houses, and the adobe walls surrounding their gardens, are decorated with hundreds of candles enclosed in brown paper bags or linen bags half filled with sand. At dusk it is as though an army of glow worms were marching out of the plain and up into the surrounding mountains. For fourteen nights this sign of welcome glows in the darkness.

A day or two after I arrived in Santa Fé a great deal of hammering began in the patio of my hotel. The little pond in the centre of the courtyard was being boarded over. As there had been a sudden and violent snow-storm I thought it was to protect the gold fish, but in the afternoon a thatched roof was erected over the pond, and in the evening the Spanish workmen brought two beautiful old santos roughly carved in wood and painted in once brilliant colours. One was of the Virgin, the other of St. Joseph. Later a whole flock of modern wooden sheep arrived and a little crib for the Baby.



THE ADJUDICATION AT THE FINAL OF THE
B.D.L. COMMUNITY THEATRE FESTIVAL,
SCALA THEATRE, MAY 22ND, 1939.

Front row from left to right: Mr. Alec
Rea, Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth, Earl
de la Warr, Viscount Esher, Miss
Louise Hampton, Mr. Stephen Williams,
Mr. Tyrone Guthrie.



THE DANCE OF LOS VIEJITOS (THE OLD MAN), PADUA HILLS THEATRE, CLAREMONT, CALIFORNIA.

This dance, which is probably a combination of Christian and pre-Christian ritual, has many forms in Mexico. In New Mexico it is danced by the Pueblo Indians on January 6th, in connection with the feast of the Three Kings. The Masks vary from place to place. At Santo Domingo they suggest those of Santa Claus.

SPANISH MIRACLE PLAYS IN MEXICO

The wanderings of Mary and Joseph have a poignant meaning to the Spanish-Mexicans whose ancestors struggled across the deserts of old Mexico and Southern New Mexico and pushed their way into the mountainous centre of the Indian country. The early settlers brought with them a very ancient play of Christ's birth, "Los Pastores," perhaps a less ancient play, "Los Mores," commemorating the battle between the Christians and the Moors which is now enacted as a tournament on horseback; and also a "modern" Mexican play, "The Virgin of Guadalupe," that recounts the tale of a miraculous statue of the Virgin who converted the Indians of Old Mexico to Christianity.

The words of "Los Pastores" have been handed down orally from father to son in a few families. Many of the words only live in print in the pages of Cervantes, though they have been spoken by groups of simple people in Santa Fé regularly every Christmas for more than two hundred and fifty years. When I first saw this play it was performed in a little hall half way up a steep hillside. The walls were bare of any decoration, an antiquated iron stove stood in one corner of the room, and ranged close to it were a few backless benches. At the opposite end of the room was a home-made altar decorated with coloured lights, and round it sat the performers waiting to begin. They were local clerks, a group of school children and the member of a town band who had inherited "Los Pastores" from his father.

At last the Devil appeared, masked and dressed all in red with a policeman's star pinned on his breast, and the wings of Lucifer on his back. (The idea of the Devil being a policeman is also found in Mexico.) Lucifer pranced round, shouting, jesting and playing a very gay devil. Then came St. Joseph walking round and round the room meditating where he could find a place for Mary. Gorgeously appressed he wears a jewelled crown, a blue robe over which is a gold-coloured silk mantle, and he carries a stem of lilies. The third character to appear is a young man wearing the white trousers and shirt, common costume of the traditional Mexican peon. But since he also wears a jaunty modern green felt hat with an orange band on it and swings a cane with a dashing air, everyone knows he is the employer of the Shepherds. After a long speech in which he complains of their

laziness, he raises his hat and walks off. Between the appearances of each character the children sing an unaccompanied choral. St. Joseph re-enters still mediating the plight of Mary, and finally he squats down Indian-fashion before the altar. A small boy in a short pink tunic comes in and solemnly chants over St. Joseph. He is the Archangel Michael. Then Lucifer returns with the Employer of the Shepherds hanging on to his tail. He shouts and gesticulates; while the Employer chews his American gum.

When they have finished, three Shepherds and Shepherdesses enter, chanting, the girls in white confirmation dresses, the boys wearing the traditional peon costume. The Shepherds carry crooks decorated with a circle covered in tinsel to which coloured balls and bells are tied. As the Shepherds chant, Lucifer comes round the audience with a catalogue advertising goods which can be bought by post. (This catalogue is to be found in any village in America, and is used by all the housewives.) He picks out members of the audience asking them, "What do you want?" "Where do you want to go?" or "Will you go with me?" He then notes down the answers.

While Lucifer entices the audience, St. Joseph has gone to seek Mary. They walk round the room praising God, and as soon as they take their places before the altar, Lucifer begins to molest them, pulling at their robes and trying to distract them with his chatter. They take no notice of him, and finally sit down in two chairs placed in front of the altar. The Shepherds and Shepherdesses return, and St. Michael announces the coming of Christ to them. He then takes his place between Mary and Joseph while the Shepherds glorify them, striking their crooks rhythmically on the floor. One by one the Shepherds and the girls approach the altar, speaking a few lines before they kneel before the Archangel. (Occasionally the prompter chimes in.) Then Mary and Joseph go round the audience, presenting to each person a doll's cradle with a tiny figure in it which they are expected to kiss. Mary carries a handkerchief and carefully wipes the doll.

This is the end of the first part of the play. The singers chant, and many bells are rung. Michael is surrounded by the Shepherds and the girls when three new characters appear. Two old Hermits, carrying crosses and wearing masks which suggest Santa Claus (one

SPANISH MIRACLE PLAYS IN MEXICO

was a very small boy), and an elderly shepherd smothered in sheep skins, even his face is made up to suggest a sheep. After being blessed the shepherd lies down and goes to sleep. He is at once symbolised as the lazy man. The Hermits wake him up and want to know why he will not come and worship Christ, there is an argument and finally the Hermits sit down on top of him. (The old men are characters which appear in many dramas and dances of the Mexican Indians, and they are always the comic element.) Lucifer stampedes around trying to get hold of the lazy shepherd's soul; but the Hermits stand guard over him and ward off Lucifer with their crosses. After they drive Lucifer away they too lie down and sleep.

Lucifer then seeks to divert the other Shepherds who are adoring Christ. Not succeeding he tries to seduce the girls, and entices two of them into a corner, and after convincing them he is their friend he blows a whistle for his confederate, who is a plain clothes man, and the girls are led away. The Hermits then get up and go around the audience making the sign of the cross over them. While this is going on Lucifer and St. Michael have a discussion which ends in a battle with swords. The Archangel overcomes the Devil, and sets his foot upon him. The lazy shepherd wakes up and tweaks Lucifer's tail. Lucifer speaks, and for the first time he is not the jesting, bragging fellow. At last he slinks away. But almost immediately he creeps back again unseen. The Shepherds try to take the lazy man to the altar, but again he refuses, making all manner of excuses. Each one tries to persuade him without success. At last the Hermits manage to get him half way to the altar, but he turns back and they go on without him. In the end the whole company of Shepherds chase him up to the altar where he tells Mary and Joseph all about himself and his doings, and asks them to admit him in Paradise.

In the most complete version of this play a kind of coda is added to it, for a little Indian boy (impersonated by a Spanish child) dances; while the Shepherds and the Hermits sit with the audience. The boy, symbolising the conversion of the Aztec Indians at the time of Montazuma, at last takes a collection, and then the whole company return to their places and glorify the birth of Christ.

"Los Pastores" was also performed, but

in a slightly more sophisticated manner, in the Californian mountains a few miles inland from Hollywood. Here at the Padua Hills Theatre local boys and girls of Spanish and Mayan and Aztec Indian origin work by day at a restaurant where they are also the musicians and entertainers. After their work they take over an adjoining theatre which was previously a community playhouse, and stage old legends of Mexican life, mostly in the *commedia dell'arte* form, supplying their own dialogue. Such a performance is "The Fantasy of the Michoacan Province," in which very ancient pre-Conquest Indian ritual has become a part of the Christianised Mexican Indian folk lore. It is strange and startling to see the antique pagan masks copied in modern papier mâché, and positively electrifying when the dancers remove them, and suddenly there stand before you young Californians whose features are the living replica of the faces carved on the great House of the Nuns at Chichén-Itzá in the remote province of Yucatan where the Mayan's supreme god, Itzamuath, still haunts the dreams of the Mayans.

The power of the unseen is always close to the Spaniards and the Indians, even in the gay *commedia dell'arte* concoction, "A Patch for Pancho," it is the Virgin who reveals to Pancho's grand-mother where her lost needle is to be found so that she can stitch her troublesome Pancho's trousers just in time for him to dash to the village fiesta and snatch his beloved from an interloper.

America, the melting-pot of every nationality has become a living bibliography of folk-lore for those who will travel even a short way away from the great cities and the three thousand mile long railways.

ORIGINAL FESTIVAL PLAYS

Out of the fourteen original plays sent in for MS. adjudication, Mr. H. F. Rubinstein awarded the first place in Class "A" to "Atlantis" by Ken Etheridge, produced by the Cymric Players, Ammanford, and in Class "B" to "The Monstrous Regiment" by Lieut. William Rose, R.N., produced by the Weymouth Drama Club.

DRAMA SCHOOL AT BURY

Dr. Stephan Hock will take a one-day School at Walnersley Road Methodist School, Bury, on Saturday, June 17th. The fee for the morning and afternoon sessions is 2s. 6d., or 1s. 6d. for a single session. Application forms obtainable from Mr. G. Schofield, 13, Canning Street, Bury.

MERELY PLAYERS

By Hilary Kane

THE Local Critic sat down at his desk and sighed; then consulting his programme he wrote:

"Despite the weather a large audience assembled at the village hall last Tuesday when the Blunderbury Amateur Thaliens gave their fifth annual performance. This time the play was 'As You Like It,' by William Shakespeare.

"The chief parts were delightfully taken by Mrs. Aigh as 'Rosalind' and Mr. Beigh as 'Orlando' and they were excellently supported by Mr. Seigh as 'Jaques,' Miss Deigh as 'Celia,' Mr. Eigh as 'Duke Frederick,' and Mr. Eph as the 'Banished Duke,' while Mr. Gee with his good diction and fine sense of character was one of the hits of the evening as 'Adam.'

"All the lesser parts were extremely adequately taken and the production by Mr. Aigh was of the high standard we have learned to expect from him. To him and to the cast our grateful thanks for a most entertaining evening."

The Local Critic looked over what he had written and sighed again; then he dropped the paper into the W.P.B. wherein so many worthier efforts had reposed at one time or another; and he wrote, very rapidly:

"This is the B.A.T.'s fifth annual show and they are no further in dramatic ability than when they first appalled us with 'Hamlet.'

"We all know that Mr. Aigh has to guarantee peace in the home by allowing Mrs. Aigh to take the chief part in every play he produces. Yet we think that by now this notable shrew should have realised that she is incapable of portraying young love and have retired into the obscurity of wardrobe-mistress or stage-manager, which we would have welcomed for her.

"And talking of wardrobe-mistresses, if the B.A.T.'s possess one, would it be too much to ask that the green doublet be sent to an honourable retirement? It has done duty for 'Viola,' 'Portia,' 'Imogen,' 'Julia' and even 'Hamlet.' This is understandable since Mrs. Aigh has been mis-cast in all five parts. But is it possible that if the doublet retired she might follow the suit, since I understand from a reliable source that it is the only one which fits her.

"We all enjoyed the prompter's rendering of 'Orlando' very much indeed.

"'Celia' remembered her elocution mistress's injunctions very nicely and mouthed her lines according to instructions; but it would have been better if she had communicated some of them to 'Rosalind' and not kept them a secret between the audience and herself.

"For the other parts it suffices to say that the leading characters received the support they deserved.

"Would it be possible for the B.A.T.'s not to regale us with scenery? We're quite prepared to accept curtains at the back and a throne when necessary; but pots of palms from the local drawing-rooms don't help us in the least to conceive the Forest of Arden. And we think that by now the actors might know where the bump on the stage comes and not trip over it quite so often.

"One last thought and a bright one at that. How would it be if the B.A.T.'s never, never, NEVER produced Shakespeare again? We aren't a bit high-brow in Blunderbury and we certainly don't love the Immortal Bard or the Swan of Avon (just whichever Mrs. Aigh prefers) as much as all that. Couldn't we have 'The Bathroom Door' or something similar once in a while? Even better, couldn't the B.A.T.'s disband and never do another play again?"

And having written these immortal words the Local Critic left them on the Editor's desk, crept down to where his motor-cycle stood in the yard, and roaring into the night was never heard of in Blunderbury again.

CLIFTON ARTS CLUB

DRAMATIC CONTEST

The Clifton Arts Club announces its Twelfth Dramatic Contest for original short plays. The Contest is open to the world. The best plays (not less than six in number), as chosen by the MS. Adjudicator, will be produced next Autumn, and the First Prize, £5 5s. od., and Second Prize, £2 2s. od., will be awarded to the plays chosen by the judge as being the best in actual stage performance. A Special Prize is offered for the best poetic play. Mr. F. Sladen-Smith has kindly consented to act as MS. Adjudicator. Rules and all particulars may be obtained from Mrs. M. Croome-Smith, Hon. Dramatic Secretary, 14, Luccombe Hill, Bristol, 6.

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF
THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE
 INCORPORATING
 THE VILLAGE DRAMA SOCIETY

President:

LORD HOWARD DE WALDEN

Chairman of the Council:

VISCOUNT ESHER

Director: GEOFFREY WHITWORTH

Hon. Treasurer: ALEC L. REA

MSS. for publication in DRAMA will be considered if accompanied by stamps for return if unsuitable. All enquiries should be addressed to the Hon. Secretary at the Office of the League, 9, Fitzroy Square, London, W.1.

Telephone: EUSTON 2666

Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accept any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.

IN accordance with a resolution passed at last year's Conference at Bournemouth, the Council of the League set up a small Committee, with Mr. Norman Marshall as Chairman, to consider the formation of a special "Little Theatre Group" within the League. The main object of the Group (which will be confined to organisations, professional and amateur, which possess, or habitually perform in, their own Little Theatre) is to render such mutual assistance as can effectively be offered through a permanent and central bureau. Already some forty Little Theatres have attended a preliminary meeting and approved the scheme, and these as well as other Drama League Societies which we have reason to believe would qualify for membership of the Group, are being circularised with details of its constitution. The annual subscription will be £1 1s. od. in addition to the normal League Subscription. Any society of Little Theatre status is invited to send for particulars, and its claim to membership will be cordially considered by the Committee. We believe that at a time when Little Theatres are becoming so numerous and successful, this new League activity will prove both useful and widely appreciated.

Mr. F. K. Fraser, Chairman of the Subcommittee of the Birmingham Amateur Dramatic Federation which is organising the October Conference of the British Drama League, writes to assure potential delegates that they will receive a very hearty welcome to Birmingham. Details of the programme are not yet fully worked out, but the following probabilities are put forward as evidence that not a dull moment need be expected. On Friday, October 27th, there will be a Civic Reception by the Lord Mayor of Birmingham, followed by the Conference Dinner at the Midland Hotel, when it is hoped that the speakers will include the Lord Mayor, Lord Bessborough and Sir Barry Jackson. The dinner will be followed by a dance which will be attended by many drama-lovers in Birmingham as well as by the delegates.

The Conference itself will take place on Saturday, October 28th, in the Birmingham Repertory Theatre (morning and afternoon). In the evening all tastes will be catered for by visits to different theatres in Birmingham. Reservations may be made at the Repertory, Alexandra or Crescent Theatres according to taste. Then on Sunday, October 29th, the Conference Sermon will be preached at the Parish Church of St. Martin by the Rev. Canon Stuart Blofeld (Chairman of Council, B.A.D.F.). In the afternoon there will be a motor tour of Birmingham's centres of dramatic interest, arriving at the Highbury Players new theatre (built by themselves) in time for tea.

The cost? That will *not* be terrifying, and it will include a great deal. And Birmingham? "Forget," writes Mr. Fraser, "Forget all you have heard about the city of smoke and restrictions. Think rather of the centre of England's lovely Midlands, with its wealth of scenic, historical, architectural, dramatic and literary treasures. Think (if you must) of our far-famed traffic system. Think of the world's best-governed city. Think of Mr. Chamberlain and his umbrella (we will drive you past his house). Think of the welcome that awaits you—and *Come to Brum!*"

RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by F. Sladen-Smith

"Drama Festivals and Competitions." By John Bourne. Pitman. 5s.

"Expressionism in German Life, Literature and the Theatre." By Richard Samuel and R. Hinton Thomas. Heffer. 10s. 6d.

"Danton's Death." By Georg Büchner. Translated by Stephen Spender and Goronwy Rees. Faber and Faber. 7s. 6d.

"Choric Plays." By Gordon Bottomley. Constable. 6s.

"Three Plays." By Elizabeth Goudge. Duckworth. 7s. 6d.

"Further Fun for the Footlights." By Courtney Hope. Muller. (No price given.)

"Laughter." By Eleanor Elder. "Midnight to Dawn." By Vera I. Arlett. "Tempest." By Evelyn Kingswood. "Between Two Prayers." By Rudolph Whitelaw. "Suicide Deferred." By Hilda Bayley. "The Bequest." By Mary Reynolds. Muller. 1s. each.

FESTIVALS are now so vital a part of the amateur world that a book devoted to them is bound to arouse interest, especially when written by a well-known adjudicator. Mr. John Bourne's "Drama Festivals and Competitions" is therefore assured of many readers, especially as it is a serious survey of the subject; there is no attempt to exploit the humorous side of the Festivals, or to be unduly didactic. Speaking from experience, there is much in the book with which we heartily agree; for instance, that sessions of three plays are enough, that panels of judges are of doubtful value, that true hospitality is to put the adjudicator up at an hotel, that the strangest ordeal demanded of an adjudicator is the solemn interview with each team after the show, insisted on in some quarters. Mr. Bourne's opinions on organising and running Festivals will rouse some controversy, and on the marking system he is a little vague; beginning with the statement that he emphatically dislikes any marking system whatever, while later he disapproves of a Festival abolishing marks entirely. The subject is difficult and has manifest absurdities, but "Dramatic Achievement" is of more value than Mr. Bourne admits. "The impression made by the judge on the performance as a whole" is a definite factor in criticism. On the thorny subject of adjudication it seems scarcely true to say that there are no standards; by this time people should know perfectly well what constitutes a good adjudicator. Early in the book Mr. Bourne says "Study your audience, study your audience" and, with quick wisdom, qualifies this. We would substitute for "audience" the word "teams," especially with regard to adjudication. Obviously, if an audience to any marked extent stays away a festival suffers, but if teams took to staying away, there would be no festivals at all—and not all teams rejoice at the prospect of being butchered to make a public holiday. Authors had better not take too much to heart the advice given at the end for writing a "festival play." There are conditions to be observed, but we shall not get the fresh, original work that Mr. Bourne is quick to encourage if they are observed too closely.

"Expressionism in German Life, Literature and the Theatre (1918-1924)" studies by Dr. Richard Samuel and Mr. R. Hinton Thomas, deals learnedly and justly with a movement which, as far as the theatre here was concerned, began by being eagerly welcomed in unexpected quarters and ended by being derided by responsible critics. The derision has always seemed to be both unjust and shortsighted; as this book frankly admits, much expressionist work was highly exaggerated and full of wilful eccentricities, but, despite this, it has exercised a markedly stimulating influence upon drama, an influence still with us, and which can be clearly recognised in writers such as O'Neill and the modern poetic dramatists, as well as in many productions and plays, including some well-known one-act pieces. It is fascinating to have this movement minutely described, beginning with Reinhard Johannes Sorge (whose drama "Der Bettler" was one of the noteworthy early plays), and going on to authors such as Georg Kaiser, Ernst Toller, Fritz von Unruh and others, many of whom are unknown in this country. Although there were various fore-runners of Expressionism, it was mainly the actual horror or war and the disillusionment and depression immediately afterwards which gave it strength; and the hatred of war expressed by the young writers, their realisation of its uselessness and their fervent hope of a brighter future with a united Europe and a united mankind, make terrible reading at the present moment.

Georg Büchner has been considered the father of German expressionism, and there is much in his work to justify this; the expressionistic quality is particularly noticeable in "Weyzeck" or in the much lighter "Leonce and Lena"; it is not, perhaps, so marked in the carefully written "Danton's Death" (24 men, 5 women and supers) of which Mr. Stephen Spender and Mr. Goronwy Rees now offer a new translation—although the tiny scenes and sharp, strange dialogue seems more characteristic of 1918 than 1835. The play is both vital and horrible; Büchner, who loved the macabre, must have revelled in tale of lust, treachery violence and death, and spares us few details of any kind; the piece is not for the squeamish. We are told that the reason for making this excellent translation was to provide the Group Theatre with a play to produce; "Danton's Death" being chosen to give an opportunity to compare the plays of left-wing dramatists with a play by a young left-wing dramatist of a century ago. The comparison should be interesting—but the reactions of an audience after this harrowing succession of grisly scenes are scarcely likely to be revolutionary.

Dr. Gordon Bottomley's new book, "Choric Plays and a Comedy" is designed to follow two previous collections, although the comedy is surely a fresh departure. "Fire at Callart" (6 men, 4 women and chorus) dramatises a sixteenth century incident, when a Spanish ship arrived at Ballachulish with a cargo of infected clothing. The rescue of Mairi from a plague-stricken castle by her lover is told in verse filled with characteristic lights and shadows and glinting shafts of beauty. "The Falconer's Lassic" (3 men, 3 women

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and supers), a comedy, has a definite and haunting atmosphere. The motif of the seal's voice on the shore below is cunningly used, and the adventure of the sensuous James IV with the lassie, Raonaid, proceeds with spirit and a skilful sense of characterisation. With "Dunaverty" (4 women and chorus) Dr. Bottomley returns in full to his more sombre mood; indeed, the play (a study of revenge and atonement after the massacre of five hundred soldiers on the rock of Dunaverty in 1649) will require all the steadying power of controlled diction and stylised movement to soften the horror of some of the passages. A note at the end points out that the plays are for an open stage, without the cramping proscenium of the contemporary theatre—but the comedy could be played on any stage.

Two of the plays in Miss Elizabeth Goudge's book "Three Plays" are attractive; one is disposed to be dull. This is the first, "Suomi" (four acts, 13 men, 3 women). It deals with Finnish history from 1899 to 1910, and echoes, in the incidents and in two of the characters, the Finnish national epic, the Kalevala, while Suomi, herself, symbolises Finland. After much suffering, the tragedy slowly draws to an end, leaving Suomi rocking the cradle of her great grandson and still being symbolical. After the heavy miseries of Finland, the atmosphere of the parsonage at Haworth seems almost gay and sprightly, and, indeed, in "The Brontës of Haworth" (two acts, 7 men, 6 women) the authoress has been at pains to emphasise what little joy and hope the sisters possessed. The result is pleasing; tragedy inevitably lifts its head at intervals, but in the main we are shown a picture of the more normal life at Haworth. All the portraits in the play are good, and although like the others the piece seems unduly long, it is interesting and effective. The last play "Fanny Burney" (four acts, 5 men, 4 women) is virtually a life history, starting with the vivacious Fanny at sixteen, burning her cherished manuscripts, and ending with her death at eighty-nine, her world already a memory. We meet famous people—Dr. Johnson (who behaves convincingly), Boswell, Mrs. Thrale, there is even a glimpse of Thackeray at the end—and Fanny's happy married life with d'Arbely and its sad close is well depicted. The three plays have had Sunday evening productions in London.

From Messrs. Frederick Muller come six one-act plays. "Laughter" by Miss Eleanor Elder (2 men, 2 women) is a capital circus play; the note of pathos in unforced and the ending effective. "Midnight to Dawn" by Miss Vera I. Arlett (5 men) takes place in the France of 1450. A captured spy, left until dawn in a hermitage chapel, finds peace and reconciliation through the ministrations of a dying Abbot. "Tempest" by Miss Evelyn Kingswood (7 men, 3 women and supers) shows a group of wreckers waiting in a lonely inn while the innkeeper's daughter, Mary, lures a ship, by lights, on to the rocks. Mary's refusal to continue the horrible task and her consequent death, makes a good climax to a full-blooded drama. "Between Two Prayers" by Mr. Rudolph Whitelaw (8 men, 2 women) is concerned with the effect of the teaching of Christ on the family of Simon, the Pharisee. The ending, with the actual approach of Christ to the house, is excellent stagecraft, but the author evidently considers dialogue is improved by a succession of little dots. "Suicide Deferred" by Miss Hilda Bayley (3 women) is a fairly neatly written sketch which

might be worth doing if suitably cast. "The Bequest" by Miss Mary Reynolds (2 men, 1 woman) is described as a grotesque. The dying philosopher, his son and a body-washer do their best to live up to this description. "Further Fun for the Footlights" by Mrs. Courtney Hope, consists of thirteen sketches (mainly for two or three people) and seventeen monologues. Considering the difficulties which arise when writing tiny pieces, each one of which must end quickly and with a definite climax, it is surprising that Mrs. Hope has managed to be so consistently amusing.

"The Theatre and the Nation." By Geoffrey Whitworth. Quality Press. 6d.

"Stage and Bar." By George Pleydell Bancroft. Faber and Faber. 18s.

"The Quintessence of Bernard Shaw." By Henry Charles Duffin. Allen and Unwin. 7s. 6d.

"Proscenium and Sight Lines." By Richard Southern. Faber and Faber. 12s. 6d.

"The Curtain Rises." By R. W. and L. D. Masters. Harrap. 7s. 6d.

"The Drama Highway." Books 5 and 6. Edited by John Hampden. Dent. 1s. 6d. each.

"Western European Costume." By Iris Brooke. Harrap. 18s.

"Man of Uz." By John Brandane. Muller. 2s. 6d.

MR. GEOFFREY WHITWORTH'S lecture "The Theatre and the Nation," delivered at the Royal Institution and now published at the modest price of sixpence, sums up admirably the forces in the past which have made or unmade our theatre, and describes clearly and sympathetically the problems and developments of the moment—the triumph of the cinema, the Repertory struggle, the impetus of the amateur stage, the "iniquity" of the entertainment tax—and everyone must agree that it is more than time private enterprise was released from the burden of providing and supporting what drama we have, and that those to whom, as Mr. Whitworth says, "the life of the theatre is the only life worth living" should be sure of, at least, some measure of recognition and reward. Not that Mr. Whitworth approves of too much state interference in matters of art, but he deplores, as do all of us, the fact that while Universities, Art Galleries and Libraries receive state or civic support, the theatre is consistently cold-shouldered. The plea for a National Theatre with which the paper ends is all the more forceful because simply stated and eminently reasonable.

Mr. George Pleydell Bancroft, son of Sir Squire and Lady Bancroft, called to the bar in 1893, and now well known as Clerk of Assize of the Midland Circuit, has written an interesting book, "Stage and Bar." As in somewhat similar volumes which have appeared lately, there are many glimpses of famous personalities, and the style is extremely colloquial, in this case being almost a conversation—we hope the jokes recounted were funnier when said. Also, again a prevailing habit, most people come out well from the survey; in fact, with Mr. Bancroft to see only the good is virtually a passion, almost everyone he meets is "charming and a first-rate fellow." This at first is tiresome, but ends by being lovable; the resolute banishment of the sordid and ugly (except for a few details from criminal trials) becomes a marked feature of the book. Ill health and bereavement are

RECENT BOOKS

referred to, but briefly ("All this, however, is very sad; forgive me," says Mr. Bancroft, characteristically), and once we are given the unfashionable philosophy "I think all things happen for the best." There are chapters on the author's parents, on Irving, Ellen Terry, John Hare, Gerald du Maurier, and others, but the Bar receives most attention, and there are striking portraits of Lord Chief Justice Russell (this includes a surprising visit to Mrs. Maybrick in Aylesbury Gaol) and of Mr. Justice Avory. The illustrations are good, the book is rarely dull, and we can believe Mr. Norman Birkett, K.C., when he speaks in his preface of the author's strong, human sympathy.

"The Quintessence of Bernard Shaw," by Mr. Henry Charles Duffin, first published in 1928, has been revised and rewritten to bring it up to date, and the new chapters have had Mr. Shaw's emendation. The volume is scarcely as lively as its subject; there are interesting sidelights and observations on the plays and books and the characters in them, but a somewhat confused picture of the great man emerges. This, however, is not entirely Mr. Duffin's fault; as he states, "it is never safe to judge a Shaw argument before you've got to the end of it" (and who shall say that we have reached the end of some of them!), and, further on, points out that many of Shaw's speeches "are only given coherence by the powerfully centralizing quality of the speaker's mind." Most of Shaw's work and its inherent philosophy is fully discussed in chapters on heresy, sex, economic relations, politics, religion, crime and punishment, and attention is given to the developments and changes in Shaw's attitude to these things in his more recent work. Dealing with the later Shaw, Mr. Duffin speaks of "a quite dazzling double somersault"; this book manages to give a good account of the brilliant somersaults to which we have striven to accommodate our minds for years, but it leaves out the dazzle.

Mr. Richard Southern's new book of stagecraft, "Proscenium and Sight-Lines," should be approached with prayer and fasting. It is a complete guide through the labyrinth and complexities of scenic planning, and gives, in considerable detail, a system designed to solve all questions relating to the stage and its settings. It is highly technical; Mr. Southern noting with scorn "the vile custom among theatrical and non-theatrical people of judging a scene design purely on the evidence of a colour sketch showing the set (and possibly only the centre parts of it) in so-called perspective"; and the problem of sight-lines, being, of necessity, vitally important, the "non-masking triangle" becomes a nightmare, the author holding that a new principle may be evolved by which the ideal stage masks itself. Mr. Southern's system applies to all stages from the smallest hall or barn to the largest theatre—a feature is the minimum group of eight measurements essential to a scene designer—and the book is filled with diagrams showing how every problem with regard to dimensions and placing of scenery can be worked out on paper. That it is a valuable book should be sufficiently obvious—and to say that it is sometimes difficult to follow is not to decry its value. Scenic designers are likely to receive some salutary shocks if they read it with the attention it deserves; stage managers and stage carpenters, on the other hand, will rejoice greatly.

Professor and Mrs. Masters, of the Indiana State Teachers' College, have written "The Curtain Rises" chiefly to help the harassed school teacher who receives

a command to produce a play. The book contains plenty of information on rehearsals, setting, lighting, costumes, make-up and properties, and, also, three one-act plays and three long ones, including abbreviated versions of "As You Like It" and "She Stoops to Conquer." Each play has detailed production notes with illustrations (of which these showing settings are better than the diagrams for make-up), and the stage directions indicate "the consecutive action and position of every player from the moment he steps on the stage until he makes his exit." It all seems excessively helpful, but (the classic examples apart, and making every allowance for differences in American outlook and humour) the plays, varying from farce to serious drama, are poor stuff; the fact that they can be performed without royalty would seem to be the main excuse for doing them. Most of the instruction in the book is sound, but readers would do well to take to heart the advice given in the Foreword that suggestions for production need not be followed too rigidly.

It is interesting to receive the two last volumes of "The Drama Highway," edited by Mr. John Hampden. It may be remembered that this series is a graded course in drama, mainly for school work, starting with the simplest material and leading up to plays, either already written or made from suggested legends by the class. In Books 5 and 6 the system is carried further; Book 5 still has ballads and mimes and "plays to make" from given stories, but there is also a Mock Trial, a Nativity Play, and a scene from Miss Kelly's pageant "The Pilgrimage of Grace," while the actual plays include "The Bishop's Candlesticks" and "The Old Bull" as well as more imaginative work. Mr. Hampden considers that his series can only be fully justified if the youngsters are eventually brought to an enjoyment of Shakespeare, and so Book 6 (after an introduction by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch) consists of excerpts from some of the great plays, beginning with "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and ending with "The Tempest." Complete in themselves, they make a fine ending to the course, and, as was the case with the other books, there are useful acting and production notes.

Miss Iris Brooke gives us another of her well-known delicately illustrated books on costume. This one, "Western European Costume, Thirteenth to Seventeenth Century, and its Relation to the Theatre," has as its aim the description of the attire worn at corresponding dates in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Denmark and the Netherlands, with some reference to the dramatists and theatrical conditions of the time. Each chapter deals with a century; drama receives attention first, and then the various fashions are described. Some interesting facts emerge—the passion for slashing in the sixteenth century, for instance, must have been a wild frolic even for the history of costume—and the book should be useful for producers faced with the presentation of historical continental drama. The sixteen colour plates and many line drawings are not only charming; they are clear and knowledgeable.

"Man of Uz" (5 men) by Mr. John Brandane, is a dramatization of the Book of Job. The various speeches of Job and his friends have been deftly interwoven and abbreviated and at times make forcible dialogue. Although many of the speeches are still, of necessity, long, experienced verse speakers could render them effectively. The prophet Nahor, who delivers the message of the Lord, is a perfectly justifiable addition for a stage version of the masterpiece.

CANADA'S DRAMA FESTIVAL

By S. R. Littlewood

I WAS profoundly impressed, during my visit to Canada, as Adjudicator on the Dominion Drama Festival, by the depth of the enthusiasm that lies behind both the work done and the response to it. This annual harvest of coast-to-coast dramatic effort owes much to Lord Bessborough's personal inauguration seven years ago. It also owes much to the splendid energy, tact and efficiency with which the Festival is now organised by Col. H. C. Osborne, Mr. John A. Aylen and their colleagues under the keenly interested patronage of the present Governor General and Lady Tweedsmuir, and the presidency of Mr. Vincent Massey, the High Commissioner. But it lives and grows by Canada's own genuine need for imaginative expression.

When the first Festival arrived there was definitely no professional drama in Canada at all. Now there is a theatre at Toronto presenting guest-companies (mostly from the United States) pretty regularly, with occasional performances elsewhere. But taking Canada as a whole the only drama it gets is still amateur. One result is that the Dominion Drama Festival represents not one type of play, but all. It includes long plays and short plays, English and French, verse and prose, tragedy, social-problem, comedy ("The Silver Cord"), musical comedy ("Family Album"), plays of ideal faith and inevitable echoes of English and American "commercial" successes. Canada's Drama Festival is not a side-show of theatrical life. It is the quintessence of all the best drama seen during the year over an area larger than the United States, concentrated in a week of good-humoured and friendly but wildly-exciting rivalry. The variety of personnel is as wide as that of the choice of play. Farmers from prairie homesteads and miners from the Pacific coast vie with wealthy and sophisticated citizens of Montreal and Toronto. But the creative enthusiasm is the same with all. They do not want fame and they will not get fortune. They just want the enrichment of mind and heart that dramatic expression gives, and they want to be encouraged by praise and guided by criticism.

By way of example, while the Bessborough Trophy could not but go to a brilliant presenting of "French Without Tears" by the Ottawa Drama League, I was constrained to

give Lady Tweedsmuir's award for the best performance by a man to Robert Haskins, a farmer from the remote village of Clive, Alberta. He had come 2,600 miles to appear in Tchekhov's "The Bear," and had to go 200 miles—to Edmonton—for tuition in acting. He happened also to be a little man, not much over the five-foot mark. But the fire and force and character he put into the part electrified the audience and left me in little doubt as to the justice of my award.

Another remarkable instance of delighted sacrifice for the sake of imaginative fulfilment was that of some players from Nanaimo, a mining village on the shore of British Columbia. These had come still farther. Indeed, the distance from Nanaimo to London, Ontario, the "Forest City" where the Festival was held—is just three hundred miles longer than the distance I had come from London, England, including the Atlantic voyage. They had chosen "The Woman from the Voe," by the English poet, Gordon Bottomley. This is, it may be recalled, a verse-drama based upon a legend from the Shetland Isles about a seal that emerged from its skin, became a woman, married a fisherman and gave birth to a daughter, who found her mother's old skin and went back to the sea again as a seal. Interesting as the legend is, I did not find the play a masterpiece. But it was done with a simple ingenuity and beauty of production and care and skill in the acting—entailing the putting over of a good deal of choric verse—that I shall not soon forget. Above all, both the production itself and the enormous difficulties overcome in getting the company together and bringing it to the Festival revealed a faith in English poetry that sets a timely example to us across more than half the world.

An exquisite performance—in some respects the most appealing in the whole Festival—was that of Jean-Jacques Bernard's "Martine," played in French by the Le Caveau company of Ottawa. Not only in the individual work of Florence Castonguay, Albert Boucher and others of the company, but in the intimate knowledge of, and sympathy with, French peasant life and character displayed at every point, this was something that no English players could well hope to rival.

Alike at the Festival itself and all through



SCENE FROM "THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS" BY SEAN O'CASEY, AS PRODUCED BY GEORGE LILBURN FOR THE EXPERIMENTAL SECTION OF THE COMPANY OF TEN AND VERULAM PLAYERS, ST. ALBANS.

Prize photograph by William Lawson.



SCENE FROM "THE SCHEMING LIEUTENANT" BY SHERIDAN, ARRANGED AS AN OPERETTA, AND PERFORMED BY THE BOURNEVILLE DRAMATIC SOCIETY.

Prize photograph by Leon Thompson.

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CANADA'S DRAMA FESTIVAL

my sojourn in Canada I found eager thought turned to the future both of the theatre in Canada and of Canadian drama in itself. The immediate idea of a Canadian National Theatre is, naturally, very much to the fore. Whether it takes the form of an actual theatre or of a company there is no question that something of the kind would help to keep the Festival spirit from petering out in ephemeral achievement. Each year has undoubtedly as yet shown an improved standard from every point of view; but if great work is to continue, the professional element will have to be brought in sooner or later and a constructive purpose focused to that end.

A Canadian National Theatre must also serve to stimulate the larger production of

Canadian drama. Of the two Canadian dramas which had survived George Skillan's elimination, "Father Malachy's Miracle" by Brian Doherty—about an Edinburgh music-hall that was transported miraculously to the top of the Bass Rock—had already been presented in New York. It is an adapted novel, and for various reasons it did not quite capture me as a representative Canadian play. The other was "Divinity in Montreal" by Janet Alexandra McPhee—an extremely clever study of Sarah Bernhardt as Montreal saw her. Neither of these, I have to admit, made me feel that here was Canada expressing itself upon the stage. But this will come, and the National Theatre movement will mean much to its coming.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE PLAYWRIGHT'S COURSE

DEAR SIR,

Some time ago I began your course of Lessons in Drama. I must confess I thought the fee rather high.

Now that the course is over I wish to thank the Drama League for the unique opportunity they offer. I realise that the value of the Course cannot be assessed in mere guineas, which are legal tender for things stereotyped, and quite inadequate for the individuality of the course. The exercises are both fascinating and illuminating. They provide for all types of mentality and craftsmanship. The amount of criticism is generous, and the unflinching response of the Director in all matters pertaining to the subject extremely helpful. In short these lessons represent experience distilled: they must save the budding dramatist many years of groping futility.

Yours sincerely,

RUTH DIXON.

32, Prince's Avenue, Acton, W.3.

A TAX ANOMALY

DEAR SIR,

We were successful in obtaining entertainment tax exemption on a comedy "Bats in the Belfry" on the ground that our production was an entertainment staged for the furtherance of the dramatic art and there would be no accrueement of profits for personal gain.

We were compelled to change the play to "Hay Fever" by Noel Coward, and our exemption was cancelled. I should be glad to know if you have any information available whether exemption from tax is generally granted to amateur societies on the above grounds only on plays of definite educational or classical nature and whether you are of the opinion that plays by authors such as Noel Coward are generally speaking

not allowed the exemption? It seems rather strange that "Bats in the Belfry" should be exempted and not "Hay Fever," and I am at a loss to understand this.

We have submitted balance sheets for our recent productions to the Entertainment Duties Authorities showing that our expenses are seldom covered by our receipts on account of our comparatively small membership and limited seating accommodation, and the accounts payable for tax generally amount to a loss.

If you can help us in any way at all we shall be very glad of your assistance, and in view of the fact that time is getting short, I should be much obliged to have an early reply.

Yours faithfully,

R. H. S. TURNER,

[The above is only one more example of the absurdity of the present system of tax exemption.—Editor, "Drama."]

ORIGINAL PLAY WANTED

DEAR SIR,

A few months ago you published the names of one or two Societies that were willing to consider new, unpublished plays for production. May I ask you if you would be so kind as to do the same for the Warbleton A.D.S., if possible in your next issue? We are looking for a full length play for our autumn festival production, preferably with not more than ten characters and with men predominating in the cast. Drawing-room comedies are not required—a stamped addressed envelope must be sent for possible return.

Yours faithfully,

S. M. BURNETT,

Producer, Warbleton A.D.S.

The Old Forge, Rushlake Green,
Heathfield, Sussex.

YIDDISH THEATRES IN LONDON

By Philip Lorraine

THE occupation of the Garrick Theatre by Maurice Schwartz and his Yiddish Art Theatre from New York in a short season of Yiddish plays has evoked the admiration of critics and public alike for the excellence and absorbing interest of their acting. Yet there exists in the heart of the East End of London, behind the narrow tributaries of the Whitechapel Road, two professional little theatres giving nightly performances of Yiddish plays, whose artistry is perhaps not so conspicuous but whose interest is equally absorbing.

When the Pavilion Theatre in Whitechapel Road closed its doors over five years ago the Ghetto was deprived of what it had begun to regard as its own particular theatre. For years the Pavilion had been the home of Yiddish drama in England, and for years bands of Yiddish actors from Poland, Russia, South Africa, and the United States, braved the seas to find a warm reception there. Some of the companies were good, some were bad. But a few like the Vilna Art Troupe were so good that hundreds of West End Theatregoers ventured beyond Aldgate Pump to sit enthralled at performances in a language none could read and few could understand.

Yiddish, it must be remembered, is neither Hebrew nor German. It was derived, some authorities declare, from a local Rhenish dialect which was taken by the Jews at the beginning of the sixteenth century on their migration to Russia, Poland, and Bohemia. Hebrew and Slav words were absorbed on the way, and further additions were made on emigration to England, America, and the Transvaal. Although in reality it is a jargon, it developed a literature of great magnitude and excellence, and, in the late nineteenth century under Abraham Goldfaden, a drama of no small pretensions. Spoken by millions even now in Poland and Russia, it was, until not so very long ago, the only tongue of many of the Jewish population in the East End of London. Changing conditions, restrictions on immigrants, general assimilation and the rise of Hebrew as a living language has however led to its decline. But a great number of the older people still speak it exclusively, two newspapers in the language are printed daily, and it is easily intelligible to those German

refugees who are seeking sanctuary on our shores.

To the Yiddish-speaking Jew the performances at the Pavilion were often the only escape from the mundane realities of life. Other forms of entertainment were either beyond his grasp or comprehension.

The decision to close the Pavilion caused great disappointment, and for nearly two years there was no permanent Yiddish Theatre in London. Early in 1936, however, Madame Fanny Waxman, an actress of nearly fifty years experience, opened her "Jewish National Theatre" in a converted dance hall in Adler Street just behind the Whitechapel Church. This was such an immediate success that another management obtained possession of the Grand Palais, Commercial Road and started the "Yiddish Folks Theatre" in direct competition. Two little theatres thus arose, neither seating more than 400, but possessing permanent professional companies playing a full ten months season of repertory every year. The task of filling them is never a formidable one. For apart from the managerial bait of "two for the price of one" on Mondays and "ladies accompanied by a gentleman free" on Tuesdays, the causes of entertainment and charity are almost inseparable in the benevolently inclined East End. An orphaned child, a destitute widow, a crippled workman, a refugee family, or any other good cause in an ever needy world is made the excuse for a Benefit Performance. And it is no unusual thing to find during the winter months such performances nearly every night. This is a remarkable boon to the management. It not only guarantees their expenses but relieves them of the dire necessity of trying to fill the house mid-week. And the excited anticipation of the special audience gives an added incentive to the efforts of the actors.

The plays performed are mainly of American authorship and according to modern tastes rather crude in construction. With one or two exceptions, they are not of a high standard, and are generally concerned with questions of domestic felicity and infelicity. Songs and dances are interpolated in a very inconsequential manner and the company comedian

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NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

G.F.S. PAGEANT.

"Thursday's Child," as the old proverb says, has "far to go." Even if not all Thursday's children, some six hundred or more members of the Girls' Friendly Society will certainly travel far on Saturday, July 1st, when they will come from all parts of the country to London to take part in the great Pageant which, under the title of "Thursday's Child," is to be produced at the Royal Albert Hall by Mr. Martin Browne, Hon. Director of the Religious Drama Society.

The words of the Pageant are by Mr. Christopher Fry; the music by Dr. Martin Shaw; and a large section of the performance will be in Mime, under the Direction of Miss Irene Mawer, President of the Institute of Mime.

In addition to the Pageant there will be, under the direction of Mrs. Stewart, the G.F.S. Physical Organiser, a Display of "Keep-Fit" work, and National Dancing, given by Members and Candidates.

Two performances will be given, at 2.30 and 7.30 p.m. on Saturday, July 1st; and it is hoped that the occasion may be graced by the presence of Royalty, the two Royal Patrons of the Girls' Friendly Society being H.M. the Queen and Queen Mary, and the Central Presiding Associate, H.R.H. the Princess Royal.

ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL FESTIVAL

Full details of the Rochester Cathedral Festival, which will be held on June 8th, 9th and 10th, have now been issued. The arrangements include performances of John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" arranged as a play in modern dress; an Exhibition of manuscripts, documents and pictures connected with the Cathedral; a concert; a recital; and, on Friday, June 9th, at 2.30 p.m., a lecture in the King's School, Rochester (by permission of the Headmaster) by Miss Dorothy Sayers on "Drama in Sacred Buildings." Full details may be obtained from the Hon. Festival Manager, Miss Sandford, the Office of the Friends, The Deanery, Rochester.

CITY OF HULL COLLEGE OF COMMERCE THE INSECT PLAY

Satire is a difficult weapon to handle—it may thrust like a rapier, fizzle like a damp squib, or even recoil like a boomerang; but how effectively it can be utilized is amply illustrated in the Capeks' play—"And So Ad Infinitum."

The presentation of this play by the Hull College of Commerce Dramatic Society on April 1st was a completely successful experiment, correctly approached and commendably executed.

Am I a butterfly, pleasure-drunken; a beetle, scraping to amass a hoard never to be enjoyed; an ant wearing out on the treadmill of Life, unknowing and unknown—or am I the tramp with his philosophical detachment and alternating vision and cynicism? Those must have been the thoughts engendered in the minds of the audience.

Gwen Sibley's production of this study in expressionism was boldly conceived, emphasis being placed

upon pattern rather than individuality. The team work was particularly good, this being most strikingly displayed in the Ant Scene where the struggle "for the road between two blades of grass" was grimly topical and a mordant commentary upon this day and age.

The Tramp of Edward Lowther struck the right note of universality; Michael Bilton's creation of the Ichneumon Fly, both as doting parent and ruthless slayer, was very apposite.

Although episodic in construction, the play had a coherence and development which achieved dramatic unity; this was, in some measure, attributable to the success of the costumes, decor and make-up carried out, as was the whole production, with such boldness and breadth of vision.

THE JOHN LEWIS PARTNERSHIP REVUE

Revue is a form of entertainment which depends so much on timing, speed and gaiety, and the John Lewis Partnership did not fail in these essentials when they presented their original revue at Peter Jones Theatre. The costumes and decor were charming, and much of the material extremely pithy and witty. But we must admit that some of the jokes were unintelligible except to those connected with the Partnership!

We were particularly drawn to "Madam Buys a Hat" and "A Birthday Celebration," and to the pianists we offer our congratulations on the way in which they made the show "go."

D. P. and J. R.

THEATRE ART EXHIBITION AT AMERSHAM

An interesting Exhibition has recently been on view at the Playhouse, Amersham. Many famous designs made their appearance here; Aubrey Hammond's costume for The Nobleman in "The Man with a Load of Mischief," and the costume for Don Juan in the Covent Garden production of "Don Juan de Manara," the Play Scene from "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (produced by Max Reinhardt at the Deutsches Theater) by Professor Stern, and Claud Lovat Fraser's design for Diana Trapes in Playfair's revival of "The Beggar's Opera."

Especially interesting were some masks by Thérèse Clement and Hugh Skillen, and model sets for "The Flashing Stream" and Iden Payne's production of "The Tempest" at Stratford last year.

Peter Goffin's designs for "Volpone" and "Mourning Becomes Electra" were most striking, and Motley's costumes for "Charles The King" and designs by Gladys Calthrop for "Operetta" and "Conversation Piece" added elegance to the display.

A variety of original designs for contemporary productions was also drawn from such artists as Mr. Vladimir Polunin, Edward Carrick, J. Gower Parks, David Homan, Edgar Ritchard, William Chappell, Leon Davey, Joyce Conyngham-Green, and Sherriffs, and from the Repertory Theatres of Liverpool, Birmingham, Coventry, Oxford and, of course, Amersham.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

THE CITY LITTLE THEATRE

The City of London is to have a Little Theatre. Under the direction of Mr. A. H. Wharrier the City Little Theatre Club has been formed to provide a meeting place for lovers of the theatre from either side of the curtain and to give opportunities to the many amateurs in London to present plays in which merit is not made subservient to box-office considerations. The Club is situated within three minutes' walk of the Mansion House, and when complete will have its own private theatre with an auditorium seating about ninety people, a well-equipped stage, dressing rooms, club room, etc. Seven monthly productions will be presented during the season, each running for a week.

The Club will be an entirely amateur venture, the intention being that acting, production, stage and dress designing etc., shall all be the work of members of the Club. Membership of the Club is open to all, the annual subscription being £1 which entitles the member to one free seat for each of the monthly productions. Only members will be allowed to attend or take any part in the Club's activities. Members who are interested in any aspect of stage-work will have an opportunity of working and rehearsing in their own theatre under playing conditions.

The first production will be in October, and plays under consideration for the first season include works by Shakespeare, Ibsen, Shaw, Heijermans, O'Casey, Romaine and O'Neill. The total membership will be limited and members are now being enrolled. Further particulars may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary, City Little Theatre Club, 89, Upper Thames Street, E.C.4.

FOURTH LONDON JUNIOR DRAMA FESTIVAL

Eleven teams entered the Junior Drama Festival this year—more than double the entries we received last year. A stimulating and constructive adjudication was given by Miss Mollie Francis, who placed the teams in the following order: First—Stamford Hill Boys' Club in scenes from "Julius Caesar." Second—Hackney Jewish Boys' Club in scene from "Judgment Day" and Gideon Road (P.D.) School in "The House with the Twisty Windows." Third—Finsbury Park Red Triangle Club in "Pawns."

While perhaps the standard was not as uniformly high as last year, the standard of the winning teams could scarcely have been bettered. It is perhaps significant that the four winning teams had all-male casts: unless one has actually seen these boys at work it is impossible to realise the sincerity and tremendous vitality of their performances. Many an adult group would do well to study the excellent teamwork of these young players.

A newcomer to the Festival was the White Horse Club in "Children of Darkness." This play about the dole was, perhaps, one of the most interesting performances, presented as it was with the utmost sincerity. The production lacked the finished technique of the winning plays, but it had all that driving force which goes to make the Boys' Club productions so remarkable.

OUR PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

The amateur Photographic Competition brought in some excellent entries, and the Editor has had some difficulty in awarding the prize.

When announcing the competition, the hope was expressed that we might receive photographs of prize-winning standard from those using the less expensive kind of camera. The result shows, however, that most of the superior work was submitted by those using miniature cameras of the Leica or Zeiss Ikon type, or at any rate by cameras with expensive large aperture lenses. Two prints, for instance, taken with a tenth of a second exposure and with F2.8 aperture were submitted by Mr. P. Moore of Reading, giving a finely Rembrandtesque effect of a scene from Drinkwater's "Man's House" as produced by the Reading Repertory Company. A series of prints of high technical standard were also submitted by Mr. E. F. Sutton showing scenes from "Charity Begins" performed by the Orpington Guild A.D.S. But undoubtedly the finest technical accomplishment was achieved by Mr. Leon Thompson of Kings Norton, Birmingham, illustrating a series of plays produced by the Bourneville Dramatic Society. Mr. Thompson uses a Rollicord camera and works with a F4.5 aperture.

The Editor has decided to divide the prize of two guineas offered between the print of a scene from "The Scheming Lieutenant" by Mr. Thompson, and a scene from "The Plough and the Stars" submitted by Mr. William Lawson of Hatfield. Both these photographs are reproduced in this issue of "Drama." The former gives evidence of the high technical skill persistently attained by Mr. Thompson, while the latter is perhaps the most artistic of all the prints sent in for the competition. It also expresses a remarkably vivid effect of drama and stage grouping.

YIDDISH THEATRES IN LONDON

(concluded from page 146)

will think nothing of introducing into the text an irrelevant laugh even when playing a tragic role. This does not seem to affect the audience very much. Provided they can have their senses titillated by the whole gamut of human emotions they are very satisfied; and a potpourri of dance and song, laughter and tears, is bound to meet with universal approbation. Indulgent by nature, the perpetual rumble of the prompter's voice does not disturb them—for a different play is usually performed each night—and they have no diffidence in co-operating with the actors in the more musical moments or emitting outraged comments in the more horrible ones.

Of mechanical artistry there is very little. The scenery is such as can be adequately suggested by means of curtains and an occasional backcloth, and the lighting is simple and elementary. The onus of creating some kind of dramatic illusion devolves therefore entirely upon the actors. And in this they are very competent. For there is nothing inhibitive about their work. They perform with a full blooded exuberance that is irresistible. The fire of their acting sweeps across the footlights into the auditorium devouring in its wake any lingering form of scepticism, and their mastery of technique eliminates with a single phrase or gesture any antipathetic barriers between audience and actors.

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